

## Document H: Yona Owens

**Navy Service:** Owens enlisted in the Navy in May 1973. After Basic Training she was sent to electronics school in San Diego. As a result of Z-Gram 116, which opened new job assignments to women, Owens was eligible for an Interior Communications Electrician (IC) rating. ICs were electricians who focused on navigation, alarm, and shipboard entertainment systems. With an emphasis on shipboard systems, the IC rating was a sea duty-heavy position. In spite of the fact that Z-Gram 116 had opened up the rating to women, it did not change the law that women were not supposed to serve aboard ships at sea. In order to advance her career, it was essential that Owens be allowed to serve aboard ships. As the Navy refused to assign her to shipboard posts, Owens decided to sacrifice her personal free time and volunteer when she was off-duty to work with shipboard IC departments. Frustrated by the obstacles at advancing in a billet that the Navy had assigned to her, Owens wrote to the *Navy Times*. Owens' letter asked fellow women in the Navy if they too had experienced difficulty advancing or fulfilling their job responsibilities. The *Navy Times*, a periodical for sailors and civilian spouses, published the letter. Owens received over 300 replies, 100 of which were from women who also felt their careers had been negatively affected by their gender.

In the fall of 1975, Owens was up for reassignment. Section 6015 continued to bar women from shipboard service and Owens recognized that if she wanted to advance in the Navy, it was going to require a fight. Owens contacted the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The Women's Rights Project (WRP) had been created a few years earlier to take on cases advancing women's rights. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, current Supreme Court Justice, was instrumental in establishing the WRP. The WRP suggested that the case would be stronger if additional women shared their story as well. The case was filed as a class action suit the day before Veterans' Day in 1976. Almost two years later, on July 27, 1978, Judge John Sirica ruled in favor of Owens. Accepting the court's decision, the Navy made plans to assign women to sea duty.



Yona Owens in dress blues in 1973.